

# THE FREEDMEN OF SOUTH-CAROLINA:

SOME ACCOUNT OF THEIR

APPEARANCE, CHARACTER, CONDITION,  
AND PECULIAR CUSTOMS.

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PORT ROYAL, March 20, 1863.

As the ship steams up to her anchorage in the broad bay of Port Royal, she passes numerous men-of-war launches and cutters, propelled by the regular and lusty strokes of black oarsmen neatly dressed in Scotch caps, substantial pea-jackets, and blue flannel shirts and trowsers.

The anchor is scarcely down when the Provost-Marshall's boat—the little “tug” Relief—puffs alongside, and peering curiously down on her deck you notice as many black faces as white among her crew.

If you are permitted to land by this steamer, you may see, as I saw, during the passage to the long wharf, a shining black face suddenly popping up from the dog-hole, which is called “fore-castle” on shipboard, a pair of black hands rapidly turning over the well-thumbed pages of a primer; and if you have interest to watch further, you will see a black South-Carolinian learning to read. I must warn you, that in looking on at this process, you commit a grave offence against the whole “Southern Confederacy;” while if you should rashly venture to help Sam in his lesson of the day, you become guilty of a crime held infamous in Sam’s native State, and convicted of which, fifty miles from Hilton Head, you would share the fate of burglars and murderers.

If some heavily-laden steamship such as the Arago should chance to be unloading at the wharf, you will see four or five hundred

stout black fellows working like beavers, rolling casks and barrels, moving boxes, and carrying burdens of all kinds.

If, after dinner, you ride out to General Drayton's plantation, you may see the camp-ground of the First regiment of South-Carolina volunteers. General Drayton was the leading rebel in this region—the commander of that force “born insensible to fear,” which ran away from Du Pont's shells—and his “place” was fitly assigned by General Hunter for the camp of the “First Loyal South-Carolinas.”

By the time you have seen all this, you begin to lose faith in the person who assured you that the negroes of Port Royal are an idle, dissolute, worthless set of creatures, who are supported at an enormous expense by an abolition government, etc., etc. You see, on the contrary, that black men are usefully employed in the navy, in the army, and as laborers by the Quartermaster's Department. When you have looked around a little farther, you will find that in yet other useful work not only black men, but black women and children, are busily and profitably engaged.

There are at this time within our lines in South-Carolina about twelve thousand colored people, as absolutely free men and women as the same population of whites in any military department where martial law is strictly enforced. A census of the freedmen has just been taken, but the returns are not yet all at hand. According to a census taken on the first of May, 1862, there were then in South-Carolina, on the plantations within our lines nine thousand and fifty. To this number have been added since, five hundred refugees from Santee; five hundred from St. Simon's Island, and about four hundred from other parts. There are besides, according to the more recent census, one thousand seven hundred and eighty freed people living in Beaufort.

I must repeat that these people are absolutely and entirely free. No attempt is made to control them, either by special laws, or by any coercion, other than that to which all men and women submit in a civilized state. If I should add that, nevertheless, they have murdered no white men, have injured no white women or children; that they have burned no houses, destroyed no property; that crimes against the person are almost unknown, crimes against property not more frequent than in any equal population of ignorant whites; that the only murder committed by a black man since the islands have been ours was an act for the exact parallel of which a



Congressman, now a general in the Union armies, was held justified by a jury, and by a large part of the public, especially in the slave States—if I should add all this, I am aware that my story would seem to many ignorant persons as absurd and impossible as a wise public once thought Bruce's or M. Du Chaillu's. But I should nevertheless have told the simple truth.

The planters have always persuaded us that their four millions of slaves were a dangerous class; and the precautions they took and their evident apprehensions in regard to this population prove that they were in earnest. As slaves then, they were dangerous to the community, so every slaveholder told you: as free men they have proved themselves peaceable, law-abiding and useful. As slaves, special laws, cruel punishments and disgraceful guards were required—in the opinion of the slaveholders—to keep them from murder and rapine; but our experience in these Sea Islands shows that as freemen these same people are so harmless, so kind, so ready to submit to all laws and to all proper guidance, so averse from violence, that in all parts of the island ladies are stationed as teachers, and move about among them unguarded, unarmed and unharmed. The recent order of General Hunter, drafting all able-bodied blacks into the army, is enforced by black soldiers, squads of whom are sent over the islands to pick up conscripts. A new broom sweeps clean: the negro soldiers are zealous—sometimes they display more zeal than discretion. At St. Helena their search for recruits was conducted somewhat rudely. It is reported that they took an old man of seventy and several boys under age. They entered the school-houses and the churches where schools are assembled. They frightened the children, many of whom ran home, seeing fierce-looking armed men rushing in among them with bayonets fixed. They searched under the old-fashioned pews for fugitives. In one place a black soldier even drew a sabre to compel a man to go along with him. I was on the island two or three days afterward, and saw a number of the teachers and superintendents, but I heard not the slightest complaint of even chance incivility, from the ladies, who were entirely defenceless in their lonely little country schools.

The South Carolina freedmen are not paupers. They receive no support of any kind from the Government, nor charity from any source. They have done almost all the work in the Quartermaster's Department; they have, besides this, raised on the plantations, dur-

ing the past year of freedom, sufficient food to supply themselves. In the season they have sold garden vegetables, melons, etc., to the troops to a considerable amount; they have furnished a full regiment, and more, of soldiers; and besides this, they have raised, gathered, ginned and packed seventy-five thousand pounds of Sea Island cotton, which will presently come to market.

I have before me papers from which the following figures are drawn. Of the nine thousand and fifty freed people of color on the island on the first of May, 1862, three thousand six hundred and nineteen were children "under quarter hands," as it is called — that is to say, under twelve years of age, and unfit to work. There were six hundred and ninety-three infirm and old. There remained four thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight men, women and youth, *all of whom are workers*. Of these, three hundred and nine were returned as mechanics and house-servants, unused to work in the fields. The remainder were all laborers, fit and willing for all kinds of unskilled work.

If you consider these figures for a moment, you will see the immense importance to the rebels of their slave population. For a time of war, when the whole energies of a great region must be used only to feed great armies, no doubt four millions of people trained to labor as the slaves of the Southern States have been, are equal to six millions of any other population. As you ride through the islands you will find this thought frequently recurring to your mind. It is just now the time when the fields are made ready for corn and cotton. The able-bodied men have been drawn away to work in the Quartermaster's Department and to serve in the army; but the field work does not therefore stop. On every side you see women, and boys and girls, working with their heavy, ungainly but effective hoes, preparing the ground. It is found that the women are in fact more persevering in their industry than the men. Their earnings are, on the average, quite as great as those of the men who work in the fields. This is shown by the labor books. But I must add that it is not the opinion of some among the black men. Harry, a smart fellow, who manages a plantation on St. Helena's Island, said to me:

"De men's nearly all gone, now, sir, and so de work don't go on; for, you see, de women don't work well when de men's gone."

"But," said I, "Harry, the women *do* work; I see them on every hand, busy in the field."



"Yes, sir, dey *work*," was his reply, "but dey don't work like men. After all, sir, one good-fornuffin man's worth two smart women any day."

Have you not heard some such opinions from ignorant men in the North?

I hope I have made it plain that the freedmen of South-Carolina are not a burden to any one. On the contrary, they have been of great service to us. If the rebels had been able to carry off all the negroes with them, they would have very seriously embarrassed our operations in the Department of the South. By the Quartermaster alone about one thousand able-bodied blacks are employed. They receive five dollars per month and a soldier's ration.

To have brought white laborers from the North to perform this severe but necessary work would have cost a great sum in the first place for transportation, and at least double the amount now paid in wages. Colored mechanics employed by the military authorities are paid eight dollars per month and a soldier's ration. Some, the most capable, receive as much as twelve to fifteen dollars per month.

There is no cause to fear that the conscription will bring suffering or want on the freed people of this region. General Hunter's order takes away from his home and puts into the public service, either as laborer in the Quartermaster's Department, or as soldier, *every able-bodied man of the population*. But the wants of those who remain behind are so few, and, as I have shown, the women are to so great a degree accustomed to dig and hoe, plant and harvest, that the culture of the soil, their chief dependence, cannot be injuriously affected.

While slaves, the only food these negroes on the Sea Islands of Carolina received from their masters was one peck of Indian corn per week. On a very few plantations the masters gave in addition, during the season when the field-work was most exhausting, a little bacon twice or thrice in the week. Fresh meat they tasted, probably, once or twice in the year, as at Christmas and on Independence-day. An old woman said: "My missus she bery mean woman, bery mean woman, indeed—she kill a cow once in t'ree year!"

They ground their peck of corn in small mills turned by hand, after the day's work was done. They had no other allowance of food from their masters except a little salt. But in every cabin I found a scoop-net, and every cove and inlet abounds in mullet and

other fish. Oysters are also abundant; and you hear pigs squealing and hens cackling around all the "quarters." The last they raise to sell, and not to eat.

Insufficient nourishment and untimely work has affected the health of these people. I am told by physicians here, that scrofulous diseases are commoner than among a similar population in the free States, and rupture is also more frequent. The recruiting officer will not find an equal proportion of able-bodied men for the army here as with a like population in the North, but for field-work even those unfit for arms are still able. They understand very well, themselves, that they have not had a fair chance in this way. The women tell you that they will raise stronger children now that they are not worked so hard, for it was the custom here to extort field-work from pregnant women up to the very day when their children were born, and when the child was two weeks old the poor mother was again sent to work with her hoe. I noticed in most of the large cotton-fields, single palmetto-trees, of considerable size, dotted like sentinels, at regular intervals, over the field; it was easy to see that they had been planted there for a purpose, and on asking, I was told by the people that under these trees the mothers left their young babies, in charge of some old crone, while they were busy with the hoe, and hither they came to suckle the little ones at appointed hours. It was, I think, the only labor or time-saving arrangement I saw on these islands, contrived by slaveholders, and that saved time and labor only for their profit.

Aunt Phillis, an old woman on one of the Pope plantations, speaking one day of the changes she noticed since the flight of the masters, remarked:

"De chillen what's born sence de Yankees cum, dey's fat, dey's big and hearty. Dey an't like dem in de old time. De chillen born in de old time, dey poor tings, dey lean, *lean* like buzzard—you know buzzard, massa? Dem chillen lean jest like buzzard."

"For why," she continued, "dey used to make we work, *work*, WORK, so poor moder hab nuffin to gib her child—child starve 'fore it born—dat's what make 'em lean, like buzzard."

For a people living under a patriarchal system, they display a singular dislike to the patriarchs. I find the testimony universal, that the masters were "mean." All were not cruel, but all were hard task-masters, so their former subjects say.



"Dey's all mean alike," said one man, when closely questioned. Now there was one Fripps, a planter on one of the islands, of whom the blacks habitually speak as "good Mr. Fripps." "Come now, Sam," said the questioner, "there was good Mr. Fripps, he could not have been mean."

"Yes, sah, he bad to his people same as any of 'em."

"Why do you call him good Mr. Fripps, then?"

"Oh!" said Sam, "dat no tell he good to we; call him good 'cause he good Metodis' man—he sing and pray loud on Sundys."

I heard no words of hatred toward the masters; but the expression of horror which overspread many of their faces, particularly among the women, at a suggestion, soberly made, that "old massa" might presently come back, was painful to me—and surely disgraceful to the runaway patriarchs.

"Suppose, if we get to Charleston, we catch your master," said one of our company, to a woman at Pope's, "shall we bring him here?"

"Oh! don't, massa, don't bring him here; we no want to see him nebber more," shouted a chorus of women.

"But what shall we do with him?"

"Do what you please," said the chorus.

"Shall we hang him?"

"If you want, massa"—somewhat thoughtfully.

"But shall we bring him *here* and hang him?"

Chorus—much excited and shriller than ever—"No, no, don't fetch him here, we no want to see him nebber more again!"

Aunt Phillis told how her master built his new house only the year before the rebellion, and "sarve him right, he no get good of it. Suppose he good to we he no run away, he stay in his house. But he mean man, he run away now, he nebber come back."

She dwells much upon the fact that her master had paid much money for the house, "great deal of money, much as twenty thousand dollar." I asked: "Where did your master get so much money?" At this the old woman rose in her bed—she was sick, and my friends were paying her a visit of kindness—and with some excitement exclaimed:

"Whar he git he money? Whar he git he money? Is dat what you ask—whar he got he money? I show you, massa." Pushing up her sleeve, she showed a gaunt, skinny, black arm,

and tapping it energetically with her fore-finger, exclaimed: "You see dat, massa? Dat's whar he got he money—out o' dat black skin he got he money."

I have set down as nearly as I can the rude jargon in which they speak. The tones of the voice are impossible to give, and they give a wonderful force to such a conversation, as that above related. They are highly dramatic, and present a narrative in the conversational form, which makes it extremely difficult to follow their rapid and thick utterance. I found it impossible to understand all they said, when speaking with those who had been field-hands. They have a curious accent, something like that of a Frenchman speaking English poorly; but, in addition, they have numerous contractions, inversions of form, and cant phrases, which make the unaccustomed listener's task more difficult. "I go shum," was a puzzler to me, often occurring, till I learned that "shum" is simply a contraction for "see him," and the whole phrase means generally, "I will go and see about it."

Men like the Harry whom I have mentioned, who have been accustomed to work about the house—Harry had been his master's manager—speak plainly enough; and as the children learn to read in the schools, they also will come gradually to speak correctly. There are already signs of improvement in this respect. It is very desirable that the rising generation should be taught to speak the language correctly. The jargon of the old people is really, in many cases, a barrier to intercourse, and gave me, unconsciously, sometimes the feeling that I was speaking with foreigners.

PORT ROYAL, March 25, 1863.

MY first visit was to Hilton Head Island, and here I noticed but very few mulattoes. Nearly all the people are pure black. On St. Helena and other Islands the proportion of yellow people is greater, but on Port Royal Island they form a considerable part of the population, especially in Beaufort. There are no statistics to show the number of each complexion. I was told that among the documents found when our forces took possession were a great number of records or manifests of shipments of slaves made from Hilton Head, in years past, with a descriptive list of each "chat-tel;" and those who examined these lists found that the greater number of those sold away were of the mixed blood. Thus the



planters and overseers profitably rid themselves of the evidences of their vice and guilt.

In Miss Kennedy's school, at Beaufort, I saw a child perfectly beautiful and charming—a little girl, some six or seven years old, by complexion a clear brunette, with slightly "wavy" hair, regular, almost classic features, and the most graceful motions. It was a child that any one might be proud of, but its father had taken no thought of this little one when he fled from the terror of the "Yankees," unless, perhaps, he thought bitterly of the thousands of dollars she would have brought him in a few years, exposed on the auction-block.

I suppose it was mere chance that in the schools I visited I found the best scholars to be among the pure blacks. My tests were by no means sufficient to found a theory on; and I heard no one generalizing in the matter. The little child mentioned above, though evidently bright, was certainly behind her class-mates with her reading and spelling; but then pretty children are scarcely ever good students. In her class, the boy who outspelled every body, in my hearing, and who was equal to every hard word given out, was as black as night, and in features and gesture a regular "Jim Crow." In almost all the schools you find children with blue eyes and light hair—oftenest yellow. One boy I saw in Miss Town's school on St. Helena's, who had the square head, the "shock" of hair, and much of the expression of Robert Toombs, of Georgia.

The children in the schools are of all sizes and ages. Generally, in one corner of the room you will find half a dozen or a dozen girls nearly grown; and from that they range down to little urchins of four and five years. The larger girls I always found dressed with neatness and propriety; the mass of the school, however, is clad in a curious and inexhaustible variety of rags, of all shades and materials. On Sunday, children and parents come to church in better clothing, and many of the women have finery, and even wear hoops. The rags seemed to me clean, which is the main point; but they hung upon the little fellows in the oddest ways imaginable; and some of the materials were of the most curious. I think it was Captain Hooper who described to me a boy he met going to school in the morning, clad in a shirt of Brussels, and a pair of trowsers of ingrain carpet. You see, they use what comes to hand.

Their conduct in the schools is satisfactory to the teachers. They are restless, as all children are; for my part, with doors and windows open, and the warm sunlight shining in upon the busy company of spellers and readers, I wondered that they could be kept in at all. The attendance is regular, the parents being anxious that their children shall learn. I heard no complaints from teachers; and I am sure that these ladies would find it difficult to manage, in a New-England or Western country school, such big boys as I saw sitting submissive under their rule. They take great delight in singing, which is very properly a part of the daily routine. They have fine voices, and an excellent ear for time; and some of the larger boys roar a deep bass. Besides the songs which have been introduced by the teachers, they have their own, of which the melodies are always quaint, and often full of music. "Roll, Jordan, Roll," has a glorious swing. The words mostly tell of death, and the happier life beyond; and in fact, all the songs I heard, even among the boatmen and other grown people, related to Scripture stories and religious sentiment.

One song, sung with peculiar force and unction, had for refrain an aspiration for liberty which not even the masters, probably, ventured to check. I remember but two lines:

"I'll follow Jesus's ways,  
No man can hinder me!"  
I'll do what Jesus says,  
No man can hinder me!"

The first stanza of another clings to me, as curious a bit of folk-song as I ever met:

"Old massa Death,  
He's a very little man,  
He goes from door to door;  
He kills some souls,  
And he woundeth some.  
Good Lord, remember me;  
Good Lord, remember me;  
Remember me as the years roll round,  
Good Lord, remember me."

I trust the teachers will gather up and preserve not only the words but the melodies which are thus sung. They will quickly disappear; and some of them are eminently worth preserving.

The people remain for the most part in their old homes. Some have removed to Beaufort, where there is a considerable demand



for servants and other laborers; and on Hilton Head Island the necessities of the Quartermaster's Department, which employs there alone some six hundred men, have brought many families down to the fort. Outside of its limits General Mitchel caused a village to be laid out, where there are now upwards of a hundred houses; and on General Drayton's place another is growing up from the same demand. General Mitchel's village was unfortunately laid out on too contracted a scale. The plot of ground assigned to each cottage is not large enough to furnish support to the owners, as it is desirable, for the present, at least, that it should—the women being quite capable and ready to cultivate the ground. It seemed to me, too, that the site chosen was the least fertile I saw. I am afraid some city-bred surveyor was engaged to do the work, more used to measuring mother earth by the inch than by the rood. However, the people are contented and industrious; I saw the women and children in every "lot," planting sweet potatoes, and preparing the ground for corn. I observed that wood-ashes are used as manure.

"Ef only de Yankees whips 'em," said an old woman to me, "I'se happy." There is a degree of uncertainty about their position and about their future which is doubtless a clog upon their enterprise—yet it does not affect them greatly.

Not only have the greater number of the people remained on their old plantations, but they still live in their old quarters, they continue to work in their old "tasks," they display the same strong local attachment which Mr. Sewell noticed as characteristic of the black freedmen in the British West-Indies. It is known throughout the Department that General Hunter never refuses a negro the necessary pass to take him to the North; but not a dozen applications have been made since our occupation began—and of the half-dozen blacks who have ventured from here to the Northern States, several have returned.

This attachment to their old homes is very strong, but they love liberty even more than home, as they have shown in numerous instances. Some months ago all the negroes on a plantation within the enemy's lines, seventy-six in number, fled in one night, in an old scow, and landed next morning on Port Royal Island. Their master had told them that when they had gathered his crop he meant to remove them a little farther back, where the Yankees could not get at them, to sell them to Cuba. The very next night

men, women and children packed up, put their bundles into a scow, and drifted down into our lines. Negroes frequently come here from the interior. Not long since ten fellows, who belonged nearly a hundred miles inland from Hilton Head, were sent as spies, to report on the situation and defences of a region they were familiar with. They were gone a number of days on their hazardous undertaking, and brought General Hunter what he considered a satisfactory and accurate report. But they brought back also their wives and children.

When our forces evacuated Edisto Island, last year, sixteen hundred blacks left their homes and all their property, rather than run the risk of falling again into the hands of their masters. These people had their corn and cotton growing finely; they were a happy and prosperous community, living where they had always lived. They were given their choice, to remain or to become exiles, leaving all their property behind. Not a man or woman remained. . They preferred to lose every thing else, in order to assure their liberty. It is very plain, that to produce that "invasion of black laborers in the free States," of which some foolish and wicked persons at the North speak so often, we have only to maintain slavery in the South. If by any chance the region here in our possession could be once more declared slave soil, not a negro would remain here—all would fly to New-York. But while they can be free here, not one desires to go North.

I am ashamed to say that the love of liberty, felt and shown by these people, constantly surprised me. We who have not been slaves do not appreciate the horrors of that state, nor will you ever know the endurance and ardor of that love of liberty which God has planted in the breasts of all men and women, till you see it shining out in the faces of these ignorant and abused fellow-men; till you learn how it has made brave the hearts of their most timid women, how it has nerved them to face every danger, to suffer every loss, to sacrifice every feeling, that they may secure freedom.

The results of emancipation in the West-Indies proved long ago that the negro, *free*, is not that fatal lover of idleness which the master always proclaimed him. On these Sea Islands the freedmen have shown themselves industrious and willing workers, and that without the slightest compulsion. Many have even shown enterprise, which was not to be expected of them, from their antecedents. Last summer, Barnwell and Hall Islands were evacuated



by our troops. When the pickets were removed, the blacks were also taken to Port Royal Island. They left their crops of corn, potatoes and cotton, standing. They discovered presently that the rebels did not take possession; and emboldened by this, petitioned for permission to return and care for their crops. Leave was granted, but they were warned that no guards would protect them, that it was at their own risk they ventured back. This independent colony returned, tended and harvested their corn and cotton without the guidance of a superintendent, and for months without the slightest encouragement or pay; and I saw cotton of their raising in the gin-house at Beaufort. These two islands lie very near Port Royal Island, and doubtless they felt tolerably secure from capture in the fact that flight was easy, and a refuge near at hand.

The old plantation lines are preserved in the administration of affairs, and thus the circumstances of the people are but little changed, except in the great matter that they were slaves and are now free. The system of administration which has been adopted is probably as good as could be contrived. It has the great merit that it interferes very little with the people, but leaves them almost altogether to their own guidance, and regards them as self-supporting men and women.

The islands in our possession are divided into four districts. The first embraces Port Royal and Cat and Cane Islands; the second comprises St. Helena's, Ladies', Wassa, Coosaw, Dathaw, and Morgan islands; the third consists of Hilton Head and Pinckney Islands; the fourth, Paris Island. The first division, of which Mr. H. G. Judd is General Superintendent, has sixty plantations, which are arranged in twenty-three districts, each of which has a local superintendent. The second, Richard Soule, Jr., General Superintendent, has twenty-five districts, comprising eighty-two plantations. The third, Rev. Thomas D. Howard, General Superintendent, has four districts. The fourth, Paris Island, of which Mrs. F. D. Gage is General Superintendent, has two districts.

The duties of the superintendents are necessarily general. They form a kind of local magistracy, to whom disputes are referred; but they also take charge of the plantations, keep the accounts, apportion the land according to rules laid down, look after Government property, and exercise such supervision as is found necessary. The local superintendents make semi-monthly reports to the general

superintendent, and they meet frequently for consultation and to compare experiences.

The people "are made responsible for planting and cultivating sufficient corn and potatoes for their own subsistence." This is the groundwork. To enable them to do this, each family has an allotment of ground, at the rate of two acres for each working hand, and five sixteenths of an acre (one task and one quarter task) for each child. The superintendents make the allotments in such manner that there shall be no waste land. The "task" is a quarter of an acre; and the old plantations are all marked off by peculiar ridges, so that the labor of allotting ground is not great.

The land is held to belong to the Government, and to pay for its use and for the use of the cattle necessary to its cultivation each community or plantation is obliged to till as much land as will support the cattle, with an acre for the superintendent, an acre and a half for the plantation ploughman, and an acre for every infirm or disabled person. It will be seen that each community is thus at once made self supporting, and takes care of its own paupers.

It was thought well not to intermit altogether the cultivation of cotton, and accordingly, at the commencement of the season of 1862, the people agreed to undertake, in addition to their own allotments, each a certain space of cotton land. For labor on these they are paid at the rate of twenty-five cents for the *day's work*, the nature and extent of which is strictly defined. That is to say, they are paid not by the day, but for the amount of work each performs. In addition to this, they are paid two and a half cents per pound for the cotton each raises and picks. Such of them, if any, as do not choose to work in the cotton fields, are required to pay two dollars per month rent for the houses and lands they occupy. There are some additional expenses necessary before the cotton is ready for market, as for assorting, bagging, ginning, moating and packing, the whole cost of which is three cents per pound.

Under this system a cotton crop has been raised by free labor, and is now nearly ready for market. This crop amounts to seventy-five thousand pounds, worth now in this market at least one dollar per pound. If the amount does not seem great, we must remember the circumstances under which it was raised. Concisely stated, the drawbacks on successful culture were as follows:

First. It was not determined to grow cotton till the season was far advanced; and the superintendents did not enter on their labors



till two months after the usual time for commencing to prepare the ground. The consequences were, hasty and insufficient preparation and late maturity, which gave the caterpillar, cut-worm and frost a chance to injure the crop.

Second. A farther delay was caused by the time required to organize labor and to gain the confidence of the people; and all through the season the superintendents not only had no money to pay the workmen, but they actually had no authority to make any definite arrangements or conclude on terms. They had to ask the people to trust to them, that it would be "all right." "We had to run our face in the most shameless manner," said one to me. Finally, after the ground was prepared and the cotton planted, which is the heaviest of the work, the laborers were paid one dollar per acre, which is only about half what the work is fairly worth.

Third. All the able-bodied men were withdrawn from the plantations, to be used by the Quartermaster, etc. This kept back the work and greatly lessened, of course, the area planted and the quantity raised. That is to say, the women, children, and old and infirm people, raised nearly the whole of this crop.

Fourth. The work was done with old and broken tools, there being no fresh supply at hand.

Fifth. The crop was put in so late that an early frost found one half the cotton still in the field, not mature enough for picking.

I have described above the system in which society is carried on in these islands. Strict orders forbid the issue of rations to any who have become destitute by their own act or fault. During the past year there have come to our lines some fifteen hundred refugees; besides these, sixteen hundred people were brought from Edisto when our forces evacuated that island. All these were destitute by no fault of theirs, and to these, of course, rations were issued for a time. Here I must explain that a "contraband" ration is, by no means, a soldier's ration, as the following will show: One hundred rations for the refugees consist of seventy-five pounds hard bread, one gallon of molasses, four pounds of soap and three pounds of salt. They receive, in addition, three ounces of bacon each per day; but this is not permanently incorporated in the ration. Any one who knows what a soldier's ration is, will see the great difference between the two.

You will now ask, How does this system work? I asked what punishments or penalties were provided for refractory or utterly

indolent and improvident negroes? To this I got no definite reply, and found the reason to be that not enough of such cases had arisen so far to necessitate the formation of a code. We have none amongst us either at the North—our laws take no account of the idle and improvident; society leaves them to their reward. Even so it seems to be among these people. Here was another instance, and only one of a hundred, where it was brought home to me that these freedmen are men and women as we are, and that the problem of forming them into useful members of society is divested of most, if not all, its difficulties the moment we make this the first principle ruling our plans. “He that will not work, neither let him eat”—that is the whole law needed.

It remains to describe more particularly the customs, peculiarities and mode of life of these freedmen, and this I hope to do in another letter.

PORT ROYAL, April 3, 1863.

I come now to speak more particularly of the people—their customs, mode of life and appearance.

They are not a good-looking people. I did not see the soldiers, who are, of course, the flower of the population; they were in Florida. But I saw those employed as laborers on the docks, as well as those remaining on the plantations.

In the schools I was struck with the singular shape of many heads. Some seemed to me to denote a very low order of intellect; but I must add, that the two children, a boy and girl, whose appearance bespoke the least mental power, were counted among the best scholars in their school, and acquitted themselves handsomely in my presence. They were the children of a poor woman who had been for many years cruelly abused by her master—so far as I could judge from her story and that of others, because she possessed an unruly tongue. She had suffered treatment so inhuman that I can not describe it here; I will only say, that not only her back but her breasts bore deep scars, the marks of unmerciful and brutal flogging. I could not help thinking that her children had suffered in looks and development from their mother's condition.

It is a fact that the whole population bears the marks of bondage. They do not look like the negroes of our Northern States,



born and reared in freedom. Compared with these they struck me as decidedly a grade lower in the scale. But when we consider that a generation of freedom has worked this improvement in our Northern blacks, we need not despair of these Carolinians.

They dress, on week days, in a style which does not add to their appearance. The rags which surprised and amused me as worn by the school children were repeated on their parents. Their gowns do not often fit neatly; the clothes seem to hang upon a field-hand, realizing the old sailor's figure of a "purser's shirt upon a handspike;" and to see a company of them together in the field made me think of an extraordinary collection of scarecrows. Of course, there are exceptions; those who were house-servants dress more neatly, and those now servants in houses do as well. But I speak of the greater number.

On Sundays the men and women put on their best, and present a bright and cheerful appearance. They are fond of brilliant colors, and might, I should think, be easily taught the art of fitting dress. I ought to say that all were clad with propriety; I saw nowhere indecent exposure of the person.

In their dress, and in the furnishing of their cabins, they have changed but little yet. Taste in these matters has to be acquired slowly; they have always been accustomed to a certain fashion of house and dress, and know nothing beyond or different. They have no models before them to imitate; for in this region there were but two classes, the slaves and the masters—no middle class, enjoying cheap comforts, to allure the class below them to a more inviting mode of life.

The cabins are small, and contain two rooms—one called by the people the *hall*, wherein is the great open fireplace; the other a dark hole, in which the older people sleep, and in which, too, I believe, their valuables are kept. Above is a loft, a general receptacle for those innumerable odds and ends which the slave cherished as "property." The younger people of the house sleep on rugs before the fire.

Every cabin is full of children, of all sizes. I stopped in one to speak to a sick woman, and was presently surrounded by half a dozen wide-eyed youngsters, the mother, with a babe in her arms, standing near me.

"You have a large family," said I to her.

"Yes, sah," said she, not quite taking in my question; "I've

had twenty-three children." She did not look to be more than forty years old.

The cabins are, for the most part, whitewashed outside; inside they are smoke-stained, and on rainy days dark—for there are no glass windows—but not close, the fireplace acting as an excellent ventilator. In every cabin hung a hand-net, for fishing; near all the quarters. I saw piles of oyster-shells. On rainy days, when out-door work is impossible, the men sit at home and mend their nets, while the women sew. I was amused at the exclamation of an old woman:

"Why, dese Yankees, dey's the mos' wonderful people! when dey gives you needles, dey gives you tree to once!" She went on to explain that in the old times, her mistress gave each slave woman one needle to last a whole year!

Their cabins are not dirty, but they have a cheerless look to a Northern man. Doubtless those men who are now employed in the army and navy will bring back with them improved ideas and new wants, and will work a change both in dress and furniture. I noticed that on some walls were hung pictures from the illustrated journals; and I have no doubt cheap colored prints would find a ready sale.

You are to remember that not only have these people no standard, or model, according to which to make even slight improvements in their cottages, but they have never, until now, had the means, even if they knew how; and even now, if they have saved money, they can not buy—simply because they are not sold here—any one of the hundred trifles for which a Northern housekeeper goes to the "store" across the street, or a little way down the lane, or if she lives too far away, applies to the peddler when he comes along on his high-perched wagon. The day which sees the introduction on these islands of the itinerant Yankee peddler will be an important one. If he is only moderately honest, and quick-witted, he will be a valuable helper in advancing civilization here.

To us, who have been long accustomed to a certain air of comfort and tidiness, it seems extraordinary that these people should live contentedly in the way they do, one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. In our minds this squalor is linked with drunkenness and vicious improvidence; and we unconsciously dislike those who live in this condition. These were my emotions, I confess, when I first entered the cabins of the people here. Those



astounding agglomerations of rags, this which seemed to me the most dreary discomfort, the gloom through which, standing before the inner room, you heard a voice—the voice of some old crone—without seeing her figure; all this made my heart sink, at first, and I said to myself: “Oh! dear! oh! dear! what can be done with all this?”

But I found that the rags were clean; that you can safely visit the cabins—the only animal likely to assail you there being the flea, which is at home also in the “mansion.” I found that the whole affair is not nearly so bad as it looks; and when I came to compare the overseers’ and the planters’ houses with the “quarters,” I saw in the one as many traces of what Miss Ophelia called “shiftlessness,” as in the other. The blacks could not learn from the whites, because the whites themselves did not know what comfort or neatness was. Beaufort was probably one of the wealthiest places in the South—it was the home of wealthy families and their house-slaves. But it has not a single one of the many conveniences which so quickly gather about a New-England village or a Western town; and though there are some hundreds of houses in the place, all large, roomy, and evidently built by men who cared little for expense, there is, I am told, but one in the place which contains what we include in the phrase “modern conveniences.”

Nor are you to forget that in a state of slavery these blacks were rigidly kept to a certain uniform, in dress and other surroundings, which was the mark of their servile condition, just as were the Jews in the middle ages. In fact, many things here reminded me of the oppressions practised upon the Jews in Europe almost down to our own days. Like the blacks they were regarded as of a peculiar race; the strongly marked physiognomy of the Hebrew set him and his apart quite as much, in Europe, as the negro’s color separates him from us; and any one who has travelled through Germany knows that the prejudice which existed there, till within twenty years, was just as strong, as unreasoning, and apparently as unconquerable, as that which prevails in this country against the blacks. Americans know but little of the violence of this old-time prejudice against the Jews in Germany; but any German who reads this will bear me out in the assertion that the Jewish face was as bitterly despised and the Jew’s rights as little regarded by the common people in that country thirty years ago as are the black skin and the rights of its possessor in the South to-day.

I am making no excuse for the blacks in all this. They do not need it, for they display a disposition to make a better figure in the world, which proves that it is not they, but their masters, who are to blame if they make a poor show now.

"Stores" have been established on different parts of the island for the use of the blacks. Some of these were set up by superintendents, others by charitable societies in the North. Here goods are sold to the people at prices which cover the cost and expenses of transportation and management—that is to say, at the same rates at which the provident New-Englander buys in the well-known "Union Store," whose sign would puzzle many a travelling Englishman. The terms in these shops are "strictly cash;" nothing is sold on credit. I was assured that the wants of the people, judged by this excellent index, are increasing; every new supply laid in includes a greater *variety* of wares; and it happens even that negroes on St. Helena or Port Royal islands go to Beaufort to buy, because they can not obtain what they want nearer at hand. The people own more clothing than before—this was the universal reply to my questions upon this point. "For instance, men and women I know have a pair of fine shoes for Sunday and a pair of coarse shoes for working days," said one to me.

Mr. Philbrick, who has had great experience, amongst them, and who himself set up a "store" in the district of which he had charge last year, says that "their wants are increasing about as fast as their ability to pay." In his shop on Coffin's Point, the sales of one year, among a population or clientage of four hundred and fifty persons, amounted—at cost and expenses—to quite five thousand dollars; all, or very nearly all, paid for in money.

They have strong affection for their children. It is well known that few men run away to us alone; as a rule they come off bringing with them their wives and little ones—often from great distances, and at frightful risks. An intelligent observer remarked to me that he thought they were more careful of their little ones now that they—and not the masters—own them. Perhaps. The little things are fat enough, and are easily taught the virtue of obedience.

The people are universally polite. If you address a man, he touches his hat to you; as you ride past the quarter, on Sunday afternoons, when all are at home, the women gather in rows out-



side, to see you, and the whole line courtesies, with a sudden bend of the knees, which has a somewhat comical effect at first.

While slaves, of course their days were claimed by the masters; and consequently they contracted a habit of transacting their own private business after nightfall. If you remember that a whole community was thus forced to provide for its interests after sunset, you will see what a singular state of affairs obtained in this way. Now this old habit still prevails; one superintendent remarked that the road in his district was more crowded, and more people passed, in one night than in three days. There results sometimes this, that a superintendent, going to his stable in the morning, finds to his surprise that his horse seems wearied and worn, as though he had been ridden all night—and no one knows any thing about it; or he finds, as one friend did, that his harness, taken off the horse the evening before, will not fit at all; it is too large, or too small; it has been let out, or taken in. In feudal Germany, some centuries ago, such incidents were common too; and there superstition laid the blame to some evil-disposed spirit, some Rübezahl or other mountain goblin, who thus amused himself at the expense of the master. But our more matter-of-fact Yankees know that the mysterious rider is a fellow with a black skin; and that the harness has been fitted, over-night, to the neighbor's pony, or to the lean Rosinante of the ploughman.

Another odd habit created by their enslaved condition, but lasting into freedom, is this, that men not unfrequently live on one place, and their wives in another, and at some distance away. It is curious to trace the steps by which a habit, once formed, covers up its tracks, so to speak, and hides its origin. Undoubtedly this separatism was brought about by the fact that men would more or less frequently take for wives women living at a distance, and whom their masters could not or would not buy. But it has come about, now, that young men prefer to live at home and cling to their mothers, while the young women in like manner cling to their fathers. Professor Zacchos, on Paris Island, related to me a story exemplifying this trait, which has a quaint antique flavor and manner about it.

It seems that a young fellow on Paris Island made love to, and took for wife, a young girl whose family lived on St. Helena's, separated from Paris by a narrow sound. The two really loved each other; they were married in regular form; but after living some

weeks with her husband the girl returned one day to her father's house, and there remained. The husband tried, but ineffectually, to persuade her back; she was ready to receive him, anxious to see him, but she clung to her father and mother, and these supported her in this course, and would not hear of her going away,

One day the husband, exasperated at this state of affairs, collected a number of young fellows, his friends, went in a boat to St. Helena's at a time when his wife's people were away in the fields, and forcibly carried her off.

There the affair rested for some days, till one day Dr. Zacchos, who knew nothing of this till afterward, was called to settle what threatened to be a severe and even a bloody quarrel. He hastened to the scene and beheld, drawn up on opposite sides, two bands of men, menacing each other with angry looks, and midway between them, appealing now to one and then to the other side, a young girl.

The parents had determined to recapture their daughter; the father had gathered a party of friends, and with them crossed, in his turn, to Paris Island, had seized the girl, and was conveying her to his boat, when the husband, collecting also a force, advanced to resist this novel rape. Neither party would hear reason, and a battle was imminent.

The presence of a white man produced a momentary calm. On a hearing of the case, in which I believe both parties agreed as to the material facts, he explained to the people that Mary had willingly married Sam; that she still loved him, according to her own declaration; and that whatever might have been the custom while slavery prevailed, it was now right that husband and wife should live together. The parents, he declared, had no more claim to their daughter.

At this there was evident dissatisfaction on one side; whereupon the faithful Sam, sure of his wife's affection, announced that it was best to leave it to her decision. Now mark what was her judgment. She said:

"I your wife, Sam; I love you; I love my fader and mudder too; in de spring time and in harvest, when de hard work is in de field, I come live wid you; when no hard work to do in de field, den I go live at home and you come live wid me."

And this judgment was thought so reasonable, that public opinion sustained the girl.



PORT ROYAL, April 25, 1863.

The questions arising from the unsettled condition of family relations among these South-Carolina blacks have been among the most delicate which came up for decision before the constituted authorities. There was, I have been told, no such thing existing as polygamy; no man had, or pretended to have, two wives at the same time; but, in a number of cases, men desired to cast off the "old wives" whom their masters had given them, and take up with other women. One made the point in such a case that no marriage ceremony had ever been performed to bind him to this woman; that he exercised no choice in her selection even; and, no doubt, they did come together here much according to the will of the master or overseer, who parcelled out wives as he parcelled out blows or tasks in the field. In some cases the people were regularly married; in very many, not.

The rule made, in a General Order, to apply to these is, that where men and women were regularly married they must be faithful to each other, and the man must support his wife and children. Where no lawful marriage existed, this ceremony is performed by some minister; and if two women claim a man, he is ordered to cleave to the mother of his children. Concubinage and unfaithfulness to marriage vows are made punishable offences.

Now there come up such cases as this: A man who is somewhat notorious as a "rough" among his people, a strong, self-willed, determined fellow—an exception to the rule, so far as character is concerned—comes to head-quarters, and says he has never willingly lived with the woman who, according to custom, was his wife; he does not love her, and she is not fond of him, for they never agree, (and he, I believe, sometimes beat her.) He now wishes to marry; but he has chosen a young woman for wife, with whom he has been living, secretly, for more than a year—and she is about to become a mother. It is made evident, by inquiry, that these two have a strong affection for each other; he is extremely anxious to marry her before her child is born. The former wife does not object, but consents.

No law was ever framed which did not bear hardly on some one. I have reason to believe that such cases as that I have just recited are decided in a manner to cause as little suffering and to do as little mischief as possible.

The marriage relation is, in general, held sacred. I have spoken in a previous letter of a negro now serving a term of ten years in the District of Columbia Penitentiary, who slew the seducer of his wife. He was held justified for the act by his fellows, and that is, perhaps, a fair index of the state of public sentiment among the people on this subject.

The young women are, so far as I could judge from careful inquiry, not eminently chaste. Public opinion did not compel them to virtuous courses under the old slave system. There is no reason to believe that indiscriminate intercourse obtained to any extent among the slaves, but it was held no shame to a girl to bear children under any circumstances; the planters, I suppose, encouraged that which put money in their purses; and a different and more rigid sentiment has not yet, I think, generally obtained. One of the ablest of the superintendents told me that he was in the habit, as the people were, at first, very destitute, of giving to each mother an outfit for her new-born child; of course, something very simple—a dress, and one or two other articles, perhaps. This was the custom of the planters; and he found it best to continue it, at least, for a time. “But,” said he, “I made it a rule to refuse such gifts to the young unmarried girls who applied.” If you think for a moment, you will understand what is implied in this remark.

To establish a different, higher standard of virtue among a people is slow work. These have many things to learn, and many to unlearn.

They have a habit or proneness to lying which is, I think, clearly one of the old effects of slavery. They can see no wrong in telling that story which shall seem in their judgment best calculated to produce any desired effect—to obtain a favor, to please a friend, or to harm an enemy. Those who are familiar with the character of the common Hindoo will appreciate this; for, in this, the negroes and they are precisely alike—and in both the spirit which has no faith in the efficacy or value of truth is bred of servility and is the fruit of tyranny. One of these blacks, fresh from slavery, will most adroitly tell you precisely what you want to hear. To cross-examine such a creature is a task of the most delicate nature; if you chance to put a leading question he will answer to its spirit as closely as the compass needle answers to the magnetic pole. Ask if the enemy had fifty thousand men, and he will



be sure that they had at least that many; express your belief that they had not five thousand, and he will laugh at the idea of their having more than forty-five hundred. "The intelligent and reliable contraband" is the dread of staff-officers, who pump him vainly for information on which they may depend.

In Irish trials you find the witness-box full of such witnesses as these, ready to swear to any thing which may serve the side for which their sympathies are enlisted. The traditional Irishman of the novel is precisely such an "intelligent and reliable" creature.

They have not, as a general thing, a craving for strong drink. Some have learned, while living among white men, as officers' servants, etc., to love whisky; but they cannot be called an intemperate people. It might be easy to make them so, however; I believe, with Captain Hooker, "that if ably-managed dram-shops should be established at suitable points on these islands the negroes would soon acquire the habit of intemperance—and thus, all distinctions of race in this respect would be swept away."

They display a desire to learn reading. It is not uncommon in Beaufort to see the workmen on the wharves, at the odd moments when they have nothing to do, busy with a primer or reader.

Their religious feelings are strong and easily excited. They all like to sing; are fond of devotional meetings, and have much of that curious excitability which is often developed in Western and Southern camp-meetings. What is called a "shout" is one way in which this excitement manifests itself; and this seems to be an effect of the same nature as what was called "the jerks" in the West and South-West—a kind of nervous affection, which, according to the best authorities, swept over nearly the whole South-Western States some twenty years ago, affecting not a dozen or a hundred, but sometimes a thousand or two thousand people at once, when they were gathered together in open-air "meetings."

This excitability appears to many observers peculiar to the negroes; I think the people here show it, perhaps, more readily than any whites I have seen; but any one who has been accustomed to camp-meeting scenes in Indiana and Ohio, a dozen or twenty years ago, will find here, on occasion of a "shout," I am sure, something he is quite familiar with.

If you remember that many hundreds of these people ran away

from their rebel masters and came to our lines at the greatest risks; and well knowing that dreadful punishments awaited them if caught, I think you will find in that some evidence of courage. The higher officers here, who have used the black men as spies and scouts, will tell you that they are cool and bold enough. Men who return to the enemy's lines to steal off their wives and children do not lack enterprise; and when the Government awards medals for good conduct and bravery in the face of the enemy, as well as for honorable and important services rendered, it ought not to forget Smalls, who brought the steamer Planter out of Charleston. He is not the only one who has come out past Fort Sumter. There is a sergeant in the First South-Carolina regiment who came out in a small boat, one dark night, to the blockading fleet. He is black, an intelligent and fine-looking fellow.

I had occasion to see here, one day, how far the bitter and mean prejudices of a pro-slavery man will carry him. Smalls, of the Planter, was ordered to go to the Wabash to see the Admiral. He went alongside in a boat in which it happened that Brig.-General Seymour also was. The General called to the officer of the deck and said to him: "Officer, this *boy* wants to see the Admiral; will you please let him know that the boy is waiting?" Then turning to Smalls, he cried out, in a sharp voice: "Here, *boy*, you can go aboard, and the officer will tell you when the Admiral is ready to see you."

Now Smalls is *not* a boy; he is a man of, I should think, thirty years, and wears a beard sufficient to show it. I blushed for Gen. Seymour when I heard him use the old cant of the slave-master toward this man, who performed one of the bravest and most brilliant acts of the war. General Seymour is himself a brave man, and if a white man had done what Smalls did, he would no doubt have honored him for it. But because this gallant fellow happens to have a black skin, he speaks to him in a way that seemed to me, unwillingly listening to him, contemptibly mean.

Smalls was engaged to be one of the pilots to take in the fleet to attack Charleston. He is thoroughly familiar, I am told, with the creeks and intricate channels along this coast; and his knowledge has been of great value to our army and navy. He seems a very quiet man, without the slightest swagger. How he looked or felt when he was called "*boy*" in this way, I can not tell you — for I dared not look in the poor fellow's face.



I have endeavored to give in these letters an exact account of what I saw in these Sea Islands, of the negroes, their qualities and character. I can sum up all, most briefly, in the words of General Hunter, who said: "In short, these people *do* work, they are not idle, they don't steal, they don't swear, they don't use obscene language, they are willing and faithful laborers and servants, polite to every body, always cheerful, docile, and easily ruled."





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